



Youth Court Fact Sheet

Youth courts, also called peer juries and teen courts, represent an alternative approach to juvenile justice that holds first-time teen offenders accountable through a sentence imposed by their peers. Youth courts operate through collaboration between schools, juvenile justice agencies, non-profit agencies, and the community.

Model youth courts emphasize balance and restorative justice, where the focus is placed on accountability rather than on traditional punitive measures. There are four types of youth court models - peer jury, youth judge, adult judge, and a youth tribunal. Intervention begins at the start of negative behavior and diverts the respondent out of the juvenile court system and into a more positive direction.

Youth volunteers take an active role in the justice process, learn life skills, have the opportunity to earn service-learning credits, and become more involved in their communities.

Youth Court Program in Illinois

The Illinois Legislature recently passed a youth court funding mechanism (PA 93-0892; House Bill 307). This law permits counties to pass resolutions increasing penalties for vehicular and certain criminal offenses to generate fines that may be spent on the operation and administration of youth courts. Illinois leads the nation with 95 operational youth court programs around the state and boasts one of the largest public school systems in the nation to take on peer jury initiatives: 27 Chicago public high schools currently participate in peer jury programs.

A 2002 Urban Institute study found that youth courts are associated with lower recidivism rates.

A 2005 American Youth Policy Forum found that youth court programs are much less expensive than the traditional court process.

Illinois Youth Court Association

Due to the growing interest and development of youth courts in the state of Illinois, the Office of the Attorney General established the Illinois Youth Court Association (IYCA) in February 2000. The Illinois Youth Court Association is a membership organization comprised of youth court programs across the state.

IYCA assists communities with: developing youth courts, enhancing existing programs, and information-sharing between programs.

For further information and resources please view our website at: www.IllinoisAttorneyGeneral.gov, click on "Keeping Communities Safe," and select "Illinois Youth Court Association" or call Amy Zimmerman, Children's Policy Advisor for the Office of the Illinois Attorney General at (312) 814-2823.